

Spheres of Influence

Presidential Scorecard

"George Bush talks a good game. But . . . he won't crack down on polluters, clean up the environment and take the lead on creating jobs in environmental technologies. I will." So said President Clinton in his nomination acceptance speech at Madison Square Garden on 16 July 1992. Yet a year into his presidency, leading environmentalists give him an overall grade of C+ for "not working up to his potential" in his performance on the environment.

The League of Conservation Voters, the bipartisan arm of the U.S. environmental movement, released its annual "Presidential Scorecard" on January 20. The scorecard, published since President Bush's first year in office, is a companion to the LCV National Environmental Scorecard, which for the last 24 years has tracked how Congress votes on environmental issues. In reaching the overall grade, the LCV surveyed more than 100 leaders of the nation's environmental groups for their views on the president's environmental appointees, budget priorities, policy proposals, and political influence. Each category was given a separate letter grade, and the grades were combined for the overall score, factoring in a comparison of Clinton's record to his predecessor's, a comparison of his actions to his campaign promises, an evaluation of who he selected as appointees and advisors, a measure of how accessible he is to environmentalists, and a view of what is politically possible.

Presidential Appointments: A

The president received his highest grade for his appointments. According to the LCV scorecard, "He has appointed more environmentalists to more positions in more departments than any other president." The report praises the president for the broad representation of his appointments outside traditional posts such as the EPA, including the White House, Office of Management and Budget, the State Department, and the National Security Council.

Perhaps the most notable of Clinton's appointments was his choice of vice president. Long noted for the strength of his environmental record in the Senate, Al Gore was considered the ideal right-hand man for the president by environmentalists, who applauded his urging that the environment should be the "central organizing principle of the 1990s," according to the LCV report. Clinton also won praise

for creating the new Office of Environmental Policy and naming Kathleen McGinty to head it. A former Gore staff member, McGinty is said to have good policy skills and access.

Several other outstanding appointments are listed in the LCV scorecard. EPA Administrator Carol Browner was a popular choice because of her experience running the Department of Natural Resources in Florida, a state that experiences almost every type of environmental problem. The report mentions that although the EPA team got off to a slow start due to difficulties by the administration in filling key appointments, a strong staff is now in place, including assistant administrators Robert Perciasepe for water; Lynn Goldman for toxics and pesticides; Mary Nichols for air, and David Gardiner for policy, planning and evaluation. In addition to the EPA appointments, Clinton won approval for his appointment of Bruce Babbitt for Secretary of the Interior. A former president of the LCV, Babbitt assembled a team of seasoned environmentalists to work under him—"clearly the best people he could have assembled to deal with resource issues—incredibly knowledgeable and respectful of science," said a Capitol Hill staff member quoted in the LCV report. Also cited in the report are Hazel O'Leary, secretary of the Department of Energy, for her willingness to lift the veil of secrecy surrounding government-sponsored radiation experiments and for listening to environmental advisors; Mike Espy, secretary of the Department of Agriculture, for allowing less conservative subordinates to formulate environmental policy making; and State Department Counselor Tim Wirth, for "effectively urging the administration to develop and improve international programs to stabilize world population and encourage sustainable development."

Budget: D+

The president received his lowest grade in the LCV scorecard for failing to back up his environmental rhetoric with financial commitments. Although the report acknowledges that presidents may not be able to control congressional impact on their budget proposals, the president and his administration are strongly criticized in the report for ultimately gouging a large portion of what was originally a promising budget proposal.

Some parts of the 1994 budget were positive. Budget proposals, according to the scorecard, included: increased funding for endangered species programs and wildlife and fisheries habitat preservation; increased contributions to United Nations environmental programs; increased spending on renewable energy and conservation (and a decrease in nuclear fission and bomb testing); increased funding for mass transit and high-speed rail technology; and more funds to help communities protect drinking water and treat sewage.

Overall, however, the bad news outweighed the good. Funding for cleanup of federal sites in the Defense Environmental Restoration Account initially received a big increase but was later cut by the House by \$600 million. Initiatives concerning federal lands cut out of the proposed budget included royalties for mining, increased fees for grazing animals, and a limitation on federal timber sales. Funding for fisheries conservation remained flat, while spending for Coastal Zone Management and Marine Sanctuaries under the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration declined.

By far the most egregious cut to environmentalists, however, was in appropriations for the EPA's operating budget, which were cut by 1% after inflation. EPA's operating budget pays for all of its core programs except sewage treatment and Superfund. One LCV respondent quoted in the scorecard said, "Clinton is forcing EPA to effectively choose between protecting the air or the water, but not both."

Administration Initiatives: B

Clinton's scorecard rallied somewhat with a grade of B for the attention paid by the White House to environmental issues, exemplified in Clinton's 1993 Earth Day speech in which he promised to sign the Biodiversity Treaty, create a National Biological Survey, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, require federal facilities to disclose toxic chemical releases and halve such releases by 1999, address environmental justice issues, and encourage use of recycled products, among others. According to the report, Clinton missed a higher grade in this area because of "a track record to date of compromising before it is necessary" and for not pushing more aggressive policies in areas of global warming, wetlands preservation, protection of endangered species, and protection of ancient forests. The LCV scorecard assesses

Clinton's policy initiatives in the following four categories:

Human health and handling of pollutants and waste. Clinton and EPA are strongly encouraging modification of the Delaney Clause to allow a risk-based standard to reduce pesticide use. EPA has also recently proposed a doubling in the number of chemical emissions industry must report under the Toxics Release Inventory. The Clinton administration has also taken the lead on a global ban on ocean dumping of radioactive waste.

Population, family planning, and foreign aid. Two factors, according to the LCV scorecard, indicate President Clinton's commitment in this area. The creation of the President's Council on Sustainable Development, which includes five cabinet secretaries, "signals the administration's increasing willingness to link the forces of desertification, freshwater shortages, forest destruction, and population pressures to conflict and insecurity around the globe," says the report. In addition, the president took a positive step in repealing a block to funding for international family planning and restoring U.S. contribution to the U.N. Population Fund.

Biodiversity and conservation of natural resources. President Clinton approached one of the toughest environmental issues, the conflict between timber workers and environmentalists working to preserve forest habitats, at his "forest summit," although the outcome is far from clear. The administration also backed the passage of a national biological diversity survey to catalog existing plants and animals. According to the scorecard, environmentalists are also hopeful that President Clinton will extend the scope of the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act to include U.S. agencies acting outside the United States.

Global climate change and energy use. In his 1993 Earth Day speech, President Clinton promised a reduction in U.S. emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. Although he did announce a plan to address greenhouse gas emissions, environmentalists argue he has not gone far enough because his plan does not address post-2000 emissions and does not recommend any specific action to Congress. The LCV report also states that Clinton has revived research into renewable energy sources and energy conservation.

White House Delivery: C-

Overall, the judgment of the LCV scorecard on this category is that Clinton has failed to make environmental progress the priority his campaign promises implied it would be, due to "bad timing and poor judgment more than any malicious intent."

Simply put, President Clinton has failed to put his political weight behind many environmental initiatives, doubting, as some believe, their potential for political dividends. Said Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, who is quoted in the LCV scorecard, "The White House takes on issues without the determination to win them. They need to pick the issues that they plan to fight hard for, and stop splitting the difference on them."

Although credit is given the administration for its handling of Exxon Valdez settlement money to buy Alaskan wildlife habitat and for a more environmentally conscious handling of the Glen Canyon dam by the Bureau of Reclamation, the administration's delivery is faulted in several key areas. Failure to fully defend the National Biological Survey and to lead implementation of the Clean Air Act amendments are among those areas cited in the report. The LCV scorecard calls the administration's political actions concerning grazing practices on public lands a "missed cue." Included in this category also are the administration's lack of response to resumed whaling in Norway, due perhaps to their hosting of the secret Middle East peace talks Clinton had wanted, and the administration's timber reform proposal, option 9, that environmentalists say falls short of the protection needed.

Although Clinton's first round of grades in the LCV scorecard may seem tough, especially in comparison to his predecessors, the report admits that many of the missteps were beyond his immediate control. However, the LCV adds that although a president has such excuses in his first year, the grading will get tougher in successive years. The hope expressed in the report is that the president will recover from some of the mistakes of the past year and once again put environmental issues at the forefront of his administration's agenda. The report calls for Clinton to use his influence to ensure progress on such items as Superfund, reauthorization of the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act, which form the "bedrock of environmental protections in this country."

One indication that the president intends to push for environmental policies came 23 November 1993 when he signed an executive order establishing a cabinet-level National Science and Technology Council to coordinate science, space, and technology policies within the federal government. As part of this effort, an interagency Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources has been formed to coordinate all federal research in these areas, establish a strong link between science and policy, and develop and oversee a federal environmental research and devel-

opment policy and strategy that responds to national and international concerns, according to a January 3 memo from a co-chairman of the committee. Among the stated goals of the committee are strengthening the science and technical basis for policy decisions concerning issues such as ozone depletion, climate change, biodiversity, desertification, and Agenda 21, and strengthening research in the areas of adaptation, mitigation, and the impacts of environmental change on human health and ecological systems. The committee also plans to develop budgets which cut across agencies for environmental and natural resources programs.

Ultimately, the LCV report says, it is up to the president to use his most valued asset, his leadership skills, to advocate environmental issues with the ultimate goal of protecting the environment for future generations. "President Clinton has yet to invest adequate political capital on behalf of the environment," said LCV Political Director Betsy Loyless. "He has not yet budgeted the money needed or followed through convincingly. But he can still raise his grades and graduate with a much better report card."

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